



Visitor Programs and Events, Spring 2012

Anniversary Edition: Celebrating Gateway's 40 Fabulous Years



Congressman William Fitts Ryan, 1922-1972

This year we will celebrate two important anniversaries at Gateway National Recreation Area. October 27, 1972 was the date that US Congress passed legislation creating Gateway as a unit of the National Park Service making this our 40th anniversary. In addition we mark Bicentennial of the War of 1812.

October 27, 1858 is the birthday of Theodore Roosevelt. I am sure that some the Congressional Representatives were aware of the significance of this day, and I am sure that our 26th president, New Yorker, conservationist and nominal father of the National Park Service would have been pleased. But unless you were one of the sponsors of the legislation, I doubt there are many who recall what they were doing on that Friday in October of 1972, when Richard Nixon signed the legislation.

But I do imagine that there are many who recalled the events of the last years of the 1960s leading up to Gateway's founding. The climate of political turmoil and civil unrest based on race was similar

Anniversaries, Memory and History

Gateway National Recreation Area Celebrates its 40th and Marking the Bicentennial of the War of 1812

We mark the passing of time and history by observing anniversaries. Sometimes these are joyful and private celebrations, like birthday and anniversary parties of our families and friends. Sometimes they mark painful, dreadful disasters, like Pearl Harbor, or 9/11. But all of these make us aware of the passing of the years and with that the accumulation, memory and resonance of history. How many times have you heard a phrase like, "Can you believe that it has been ten years since the 9/11 attack?" or, where were you on 9/11?" Or for an earlier generation, where were you on Pearl Harbor Day, or the day on which John F. Kennedy was assassinated. These questions make us acutely aware of the passing of time and make us focus with clarity on these events and draw us immediately into a vivid awareness of history.

Staten Island 350th Celebration

In the year that just passed, Staten Island marked the 350th anniversary of the founding of the first settlements by colonists. During the 2011 year, more than thirty organizations, including Gateway, sponsored events including lectures, readings, walks, hikes, and various special events. While there was no one around with any direct connections to the events of 350 years ago, there were some who could recall the 300th anniversary, and those memories prompted the recounting many wonderful stories and events that occurred in the previous fifty years—the anniversaries help us to reflect upon the passing of time and history.

to the civil unrest of the Occupy Wall Street movement that we have seen today.

In the late 1960s Gateway NRA was merely a dream held by a few citizen groups, the NPS and a number of elected officials, most notably the late Congressman William Fitts Ryan of Manhattan. During his distinguished career, Ryan had devoted himself to working for the people of New York, but his legislation to establish a national park in America's largest metropolis was his greatest success.

It was the civil unrest and race riots that were motivating factors in the establishment of Gateway NRA, and Golden Gate National Recreation Area (also Oct. 27, 1972) along with the Cuyahoga River Valley National Park (Dec. 27, 1974, originally designated as a National Recreation Area, but later changed by an act of Congress to National Park).

In the case of both Gateway and Golden Gate, the lands set aside for the creation of the NPS sites had been

large military bases on prime waterfront acreage. It was the feeling that creating these parks would provide inner city dwellers with new opportunities for recreation on their doorstep. In the Cleveland area, the impetus for the creation of NPS ownership was to add to some already created local park land to prevent urban sprawl from gobbling up the scenic waterfront area by real estate developers

Since the creation of these park lands the people of San Francisco, Cleveland and New York City have flocked by the millions to use the facilities and access the water.

Indeed, in these forty years that have passed, Gateway has become one of the most visited park units in the NPS system with attendance hovering around 9.5 million persons per year for the three units located in New Jersey, Staten Island, Brooklyn and Queens. Happy Birthday, Gateway !! --Charles Markis

The Origins of Gateway National Recreation Area

On October 27, 2012 Gateway National Recreation Area will celebrate its 40th anniversary. Gateway was one of the first urban national parks in the United States, created to bring the national parks to the people in metropolitan areas of the US, a new concept would allow large numbers of people to visit national parks without having to travel to remote areas of the country.

Many people worked very hard to ensure that Gateway would be created. One of its strongest proponents was then Mayor of New York City, John Lindsay. Lindsay went to Washington D.C. to gather support at the national level. Others shared his vision, people like Congressman William Fitts Ryan who was a chief proponent; he has been honored for his tireless work on the creation of Gateway by having the Visitor Center at Floyd Bennett Field named in his honor.

Gateway quickly became one of the country's most visited parks, proving its need to the community. While Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon or other great western parks come to mind thinking of the NPS, Gateway, along with the country's other recreation areas, have filled a much needed niche for the urban dwellers.

Gateway is a 26,000 acre combination of natural and historic landscapes set in the middle of a metropolis. How do you turn this into a National Park? This was the problem faced by the first park rangers at Gateway. It certainly did not fit the traditional mold of what people think of when they think "National Park." The first projects were small in scope, but big in vision. Some people concentrated on clearing the areas of debris; others began by having workshops that involved local teachers, naturalists and historians. They were teaching the public as well as themselves in learning about this unique resource.

The employees' reminiscences from the 25th anniversary at Gateway reveal two things: First was the enthusiasm and vision that these people had to get the park up and running. Second was their longevity and dedication in their employment here: We have employees at Gateway who have been here 30 or more years, unusual in the park system. Most rangers work at many different parks during their careers.

The activities available within the park are extensive: Gateway has the only urban campground in NYC. In addition, there are environmental education programs, sports fields, concerts, community gardens and history abounds.

Within the sites we have beaches, lighthouses, forts, a pier, airfields, and the only wildlife refuge in the National park service. The park consists of sites in Brooklyn, Staten Island, Queens, New York and also Sandy Hook, New Jersey.

Because of its proximity to NYC, Gateway provides a place for escape into nature for a few hours at a time. It is a place of recreation, reflection, learning, and sports. Gateway, like most parks, is visited by people who return often and feel connected to this sanctuary, each person having a favorite spot.

In my position here, caring for and writing about Gateway's cultural resources has allowed me to explore the park's rich history in detail. This reflection has allowed me to view the park as a whole and see that Gateway is truly more than the sum of its parts and provides a place for nine million people per year to visit a national park in their own back yard. -Felice Ciccione, Curator



Events and Activities Planned

**War of 1812
Bicentennial Celebration
Fort Wadsworth Visitor Center
Sunday, May 27
10 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. *See listing.***

**Memorial Quilt War of 1812
Fort Wadsworth Visitor Center
Sundays, March 11 & 25
April 15, 22, & 29
2 p.m. – 4 p.m. *See listing.***

**Ryan Visitor Center
Grand Re - opening!
Gateway's 40th
Floyd Bennett Field *See listing.*
Ryan Visitor Center 9 a.m. 5 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday, May 5 & 6**

**Coastal Defenses Day and
Ocean Fun Day
Gateway's 40th
Sunday, May 20 *See listing.*
Sandy Hook 12 p.m. – 4 p.m.**

**Going Bunkers
War of 1812 Bicentennial
Sandy Hook *See listing.*
Sunday, April 29 2- 5 p.m.**

**Secret Places of
Sandy Hook
War of 1812 Bicentennial
Sunday, May 6
2 p.m. – 5 p.m. *See listing.***

Looking Back on the War of 1812

“It has been nearly 30 years since we’ve won our Independence. But, will we see our democratic experiment survive?”

The young republic’s first war pitted the United States against its old adversary Great Britain, which, by 1812, was already embroiled in a long war with Napoleon Bonaparte.

It was a conflict that encompassed the entire country as it was in the early years of the 19th century. The western frontier of the Michigan territory heard the cries of “Remember the Raisin!” and the Great Lakes saw action as American columns marched through the modern-day Canadian provinces of Ontario and Québec seeking to expand the northern border.

The Baltimore-Washington corridor was the centerpiece of the British war effort in 1814, leaving the capital city in flames, and the final shots of the war were fired among the bayous of Louisiana and the Atlantic coast of Georgia, the combatants unaware that peace had been formally declared.

Though considered one of America’s “forgotten wars,” the War of 1812 is preserved in the National Park System in areas as diverse as Fort McHenry National Monument in Maryland, Perry’s Victory and International Peace Memorial in Ohio, George Rogers Clark National Historical Park in Indiana, as well as Gulf Islands National Seashore along the coast of Mississippi and Florida, and Cumberland Island National Seashore in Georgia.

Through partnerships and a tireless commitment to history and the future, these and other places that reflect the roots of American freedom, sacrifice, and sovereignty can be saved for future generations through prompt and focused action today.

Probably the most notable outcome of the War of 1812 was the system of shoreline defense that was established. While the forts and batteries that were built at this time have outgrown their usefulness as military fortifications, the principal of homeland defense was developed and furthered as military might and domination has gone from land and sea to air, space and the cyber world. --Jason Wickersty



Battery Weed, added after the War of 1812, survives as part of the system of shoreline defense brought about by the conflict.